

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. DENNIE OXLEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – With just two days remaining in the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly, there has been no resolution on this year's major initiatives.

This is to be expected. It is a fact of life that legislators tend to exhaust every possible minute from a session before reaching final agreement. Only the subject matter changes. In 2005, it was passing a biennial state budget. In 2006, it's passing the governor's plan to sell the Indiana Toll Road to foreign investors.

If the process is hard to follow at this time of year, much of that confusion is caused by the fact that so many important proposals are being negotiated in conference committees. These are the groups of legislators – two from the House and two from the Senate – who are charged with settling differences in each chamber's version of a particular bill.

As I mentioned in my last Statehouse Report, sometimes the differences on an issue can be minor and a resolution is reached quickly. On major issues, though, it's never that easy and that's when the legislative process gets very interesting...not to mention infuriating and confounding.

Many times, a conference committee will turn a bill into the host for a number of proposals, some of which have nothing to do with the original bill. There have been times when as many as 15 to 20 different measures have been rolled into one conference committee report.

This is possible as long as you remember two basic ideas. First, any bill that has cleared either the House or Senate remains alive for consideration throughout the rest of a legislative session. Second, any proposal added to a conference committee report must have the same general subject matter as the original bill. In the language of the Indiana General Assembly, it must be germane.

It doesn't take very long to see that germaneness can be defined very loosely. There have been efforts in recent years to curb this trend, but you can still see a single conference committee report that contains language on issues as diverse as education, roads and transportation, health care and economic development. It all depends on the importance of a particular bill whether it stays with one subject or turns into a Christmas tree with many subjects.

There are two bills that have the potential of becoming Christmas trees in 2006.

One is House Bill 1001, which contains proposals aimed at providing property tax relief. The version preferred by the House majority outlines a series of tax breaks, but provides no way to pay for them. The Senate version is geared more toward giving local units of government the flexibility to enact local option taxes, with the hope the revenue generated will be used to cut property taxes.

The second is House Bill 1008, the governor's plan to sell the Indiana Toll Road to foreign interests to finance his Major Moves infrastructure improvement program.

There are many differences in the versions of HB 1008 that were passed by the House and Senate majorities.

The Senate plan places \$400 million from the toll road sale into a trust fund that would eventually be used to fund highway projects. The House proposal does not have this provision.

The Senate plan requires the Legislature to approve any future effort to require tolls for any future road or bridge

project, like the Interstate 69 extension between Indianapolis and Evansville and the proposed bridges spanning the Ohio River near Louisville. The House bill provides no such legislative oversight.

The Senate plan also makes substantial changes in the route that the I-69 extension would take on the south side of Indianapolis, a switch that would cause delays in proceeding with the project.

However, both versions enable the governor to proceed with his plan to sell the toll road to foreign investors for a period that could extend up to 99 years.

The people I represent have made it very clear to me that they do not like selling off a public asset to a private, foreign company. Until this question is resolved, I intend to follow the wishes of my constituents and oppose House Bill 1008.

My hope is that these concerns will be addressed before this session comes to a close.

If you need to reach me during the final days of the 2006 legislative session, you can call me toll-free at 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at [www.IN.gov/H73](http://www.IN.gov/H73) or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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